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IS REASONING GENDERED?

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Abstract:

The relevance of feminism for argumentation has been the subject of lively debates recently. I explore the viability of applying feminist categories to argumentation with a focus on the relevance of gender in reasoning and rationality. Arguing from the view that particular *practices* of reasoning are gendered, as operating within a gendered socio-political context, I examine the implications of conditioned reasoning for a conception of reason. Are reasoning and rationality in some *fundamental* sense conditioned, e.g., gendered? I argue for a conceptualization of reason as a structural complex whose character can be conditioned yet is non-relativistic.

The question of the possible relevance of feminist analysis for conceptions of reason, argumentation theory, and possibly even logic has recently given rise to some lively, if not to say heated debates.¹ There are, of course, various facets to this interaction, meeting with varying degrees of acceptance, and clearly one important factor is which particular focus or area one has in mind. At one end of the spectrum perhaps might be potential applications of gender categories in certain areas of critical thinking where, for example, the process of critically analyzing reasoning takes place within the recognition of the significance of conceptual frameworks, bias, and various contextual issues; feminism, as socio-political and conceptual critique, affords in this case the possibility of yet another critical perspective and thus feminism and critical thinking would appear to have certain compatibilities and points of contact. At the other end of the spectrum, in terms of feminist analyses which have met with more resistance, would doubtless be certain feminist critiques of logic advancing indictments of traditional logic as patriarchal, oppressive, and hegemonic, characterized for example as the "logic of domination."² Somewhere in between these two would lie feminist analyses of gender and reasoning, ranging from critiques of traditional reason and rationality—with related critiques of epistemology and science—to the exploration of the question of gender differences in reasoning, masculine and feminine styles of rationality and—most provocatively—the question of masculine and feminine logic(s).

If we situate reason and reasoning in the broader context of philosophical discourse, what is also at issue in a related, and often presupposed sense, is the viability of the interaction of feminism and philosophy. Here, too, there are numerous facets, as there are in any interaction between feminism and the larger scholarly tradition. These range from the application of a feminist critique—for example the analysis of questionable concepts or models, of a perceived masculinist bias, or apparent deficiencies or lacunae in the account under question—to the generating of a supplemental analysis which can redress these gender-based lacunae (women's history, as the missing account, is a good example), to the more fundamental transformation of a field or discipline based on the acknowledgement of hitherto overlooked features and criteria—such as gender. In the latter case feminist analysis goes beyond critique to transformative discourse; but the transformation is predicated on and to a degree eventually required by the critique.

In this paper I propose to explore some of the aspects of these issues with particular focus on the question of the relevance of gender in reasoning and rationality. I begin by sketching some of the aspects of the related feminist analysis of "gendered philosophy," where what is at issue is not only the potentially gendered aspects of the discipline of philosophy, but of philosophical discourse in a more fundamental sense. I then proceed to outline, by drawing on some of the implications of this above analysis, a framework for articulating a conception of gendered reasoning based on a phenomenological-hermeneutic model which, I will argue, avoids some of the problems of prevailing accounts of gendered or conditioned reasoning, while preserving a viable philosophical conception of reason and rationality.

1. Gender as an Issue in Philosophy: Some Aspects

The interaction of feminism with the philosophical tradition has occasioned one of the most intriguing (and volatile) arenas in the feminist analysis of the scholarly tradition. On the one hand, from the point of view of an alleged masculine bias or inherent sexism, many feminists have long held that philosophy, as a discipline and as historical discourse, has a particularly problematic history. It is therefore generally thought to be a very good candidate for feminist analysis. On the other hand, though, given its traditional self-definition and character, philosophy would appear to be the most impervious to a gender analysis: the very principles which constitute the being of philosophical discourse would appear to be those which by definition transcend the cultural character and particularity of gender analysis. A crucial component of the traditional goal, if not essence, of philosophical discourse has always been the endeavour to articulate non-particular or trans-cultural claims; where particularity or culturally-specific claims are generally considered to be too closely associated with relativism, itself anathema for philosophy. As such, with the exception of the more obvious (and, it is to be hoped, uncontroversial) targets of feminist critique—such as philosophical arguments for women's inferiority—it is often claimed that for many if not most fundamental philosophical questions gender is not, or should not be, an issue.

On the surface, there would appear to be significant differences and incompatibilities between feminism and philosophy. Feminism takes as its point of departure the significance of gender and sexual difference.³ That is to say not only that gender constitutes a primary focus and orientation, but that a central defining principle for feminist theory is the importance and effect of gender in shaping human experience. As such, a good deal of feminist analysis has been concerned precisely with investigating the implications and dynamics of gender in all aspects of lived experience. Furthermore, feminism is generally construed to be an inherently socio-political discourse, which is to say that while philosophy addresses questions of social and political life, it does not generally see *itself* as a socially specific or political discourse, at least in many cases or traditionally and in terms of its traditional questions. Rather, once again, with cornerstone desiderata of objectivity and universality and the accompanying repudiation of relativism, any discourse which by its nature is culturally and socially specified would appear to be essentially at odds with philosophy. Moreover, such particularity, seen as the failure of neutrality and objectivity, would be construed as bias and therefore not just at odds with philosophy, but problematic from a philosophical point of view.

To the extent that such feminist analyses, when undertaken with respect to philosophy, clearly contravene the self-definition of philosophy sketched above, this constitutes one of the most salient aspects of the challenge of feminism to philosophy. At this level the main concern is not so much the uncovering of a particular philosopher's misogynist claims about women, but rather more fundamentally the articulation of the relevance of gender in philosophical discourse and activity; that is, *to make gender an issue* for philosophy, in an endeavour which

extends far beyond the mere highlighting of a "woman's perspective," and points towards fundamental transformations. In other words, at this level the apparent incompatibilities between feminism and philosophy are, from a critical point of view, more indicative of the problems with traditional philosophy that feminism seeks to analyze and address. Arguments for the relevance of gender, as a preamble to examining the import of gender considerations for philosophy, can only take place within a broader context of inquiry in which the traditional philosophical tenets of objectivity, neutrality, and universality and their construals are examined. So, in arguing for the relevance of gender, feminism is necessarily putting into question such tenets that traditionally excluded issues of gender. By the same token, to look ahead to what I will be developing, any account, such as hermeneutics, which in taking as *its* point of departure the re-examination of these tenets, is led to advocate the significance of situation and context, thereby grounds the possibility for a variety of specified analyses, including that of gender.

Clearly the position I am moving towards is not only that gender *is* relevant, but that it is relevant for philosophy; that is, that philosophy is not exempt.⁴ Many feminist analyses of philosophy have taken this position of course; here again I am not thinking only of critiques of sexism or misogyny in philosophy, but of feminist analyses of the implications of gender for traditional philosophical areas, such as the feminist analyses of epistemology or philosophy of science.⁵ Even though these analyses move more into a transformative domain where they are no longer merely critiquing misogyny or sexism in a given area, but setting the groundwork for a fundamental transformation, they are still nevertheless often very closely tied to the (often earlier) critiques of sexism. One of the important consequences of such critiques was to reveal the deeper implications of this sexism: the presence of bias in the philosophical account, expressed in this instance as sexist or masculinist bias, thus undermining philosophy's claim to neutrality and perfect objectivity.

This is connected for example to discussions dealing with the question of the "maleness" of philosophy—whether philosophy was systematically masculinized over its history and throughout its development. In other words, whether philosophy as a discipline and/or as a discursive activity is gendered.⁶ I cannot do more than merely characterize these discussions in such a short space, but they involve aspects ranging from the exclusion of women from philosophy and philosophical thought, to the tracing of male gendered cultural images, traits, and ideals in the development of philosophy. There are also related accounts concerning the genealogy of such gender traits and ideals, Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalysis-based object-relations theory perhaps the most well-known and widely cited.⁷ The plausibility of such formative gender traits, although often rejected, seems to be more straightforward provided one situates gender as a cultural construct—I return to this point below. At any rate, with respect to the question of whether gender categories can be applied to philosophy, the putative presence of an identifiably masculine bias attests that the account is already gendered.⁸ As such, the feminist analysis does not create the gendered account so much as recognizes that an account is already gendered—recognizes gender as a factor—and then proceeds to analyze the account on the basis of the claims and omissions that that particular gender framework might have occasioned, redressing and/or supplementing that account by contributing the perspective of the *other* gender.

Thus for many feminist analyses, the notion that philosophy and philosophical issues are not exempt from considerations of gender is arrived at through the disclosure of the presence and implications of gender factors already operative in philosophical discourse, and in ways which were formative for philosophical discourse. It might be argued from a more orthodox perspective that *even if* it were allowed that philosophy demonstrate gender traces (and even this might not be acknowledged), that given the extent to which this contravenes the ideals of philosophical discourse, this cannot be admitted as genuine philosophy; rather, such traces are indicative of bias and various other lapses in objectivity, and this is thus a corrupted discourse.

For one thing, to argue that this might amount only to "lapses in objectivity" would suggest an occasional or temporary phenomenon. However, a key argument in these analyses of gendered philosophy is that this "bias" does not appear as merely an occasional aberration, a momentary glitch, but that the roots are deep and pervasive; in other words, that the presence of gender in this discourse is systemic (much as feminists argue that sexism is not as such an act, but a systemic process). This case is made particularly in work in the history of philosophy undertaken by feminists such as Genevieve Lloyd, where gendered or gender-related images and motifs are traced throughout the history of philosophy, showing not only that they follow a progressive dialectic as this history unfolds, but that many of these motifs are at the heart and essence of central philosophical precepts. As Val Plumwood states in a related point:

It would be naive indeed to assume that these conceptions of ruling reason are merely "abuses" of a basically neutral concept, ideas about reason which have no impact on the construction of reason itself, but have been entirely accidental and extraneous to it. It has been the task of feminist philosophers particularly to show how the historical construction of reason as masculine has structured its dominant forms not only in an exclusion and oppositional relation to women, but to the characteristics and area of life they have been taken to represent, such as emotionality, bodiliness, animality and particularity.⁹

Given the numerous instances and the pervasiveness of such aspects, and their key determining roles, it does not seem possible to characterize them as "lapses," unless one is willing to see extended periods in the history of philosophy as one long lapse, with the ideal still intact, somewhere, if rarely realized.

Moreover, within a framework arguing for the viability of such cultural factors in philosophy, the notion that philosophical discourse is gendered (as revealed through a perceived, masculine perspective) is not necessarily indicative of a problematic defect by virtue of its being gendered: problematic aspects arise in terms of *what is* being claimed, not because there *is* a gendered framework at issue, except insofar as that framework contains problematic features which may lead to problematic claims. This point is related to the notion of the inevitability of such frameworks, to which I return below. In other words, the (male) gendered framework which may have dominated philosophical discourse is not necessarily problematic *because* it is gendered—i.e., because gender has played such a role—but rather because at issue is *this* particular cultural manifestation of gender with all of its attendant features and ramifications.

In view of the above, the claim that a philosophical account displays masculinist bias mitigates its claims to be generic, neutral, and objective. The account is *not* neutral if in fact it operates from a specified perspective—i.e., where neutrality would traditionally suggest a-perspectival. And where such perspectives bespeak subjective stances, here male subjectivity, then claims of objectivity—as non-subjective—are also undermined. Therefore, as I suggested above, what is necessarily put into question in the consideration of gender and philosophy is the conception of notions such as objectivity and universality, and the role of cultural determinations in philosophical discourse. In the larger sense, then, what is at issue is the putative a-contextuality of philosophy, where such a-contextuality allegedly grounds the possibility of objective or non-relative claims. In other words gender is a contextual variable, and in proposing to analyze philosophy from the point of view of gender, the alleged a-contextuality of philosophical discourse is necessarily interrogated. Correspondingly, any discourse which has endeavoured to examine the ways in which philosophical discourse *is* contextual creates the possibility of the consideration of gender as a significant factor. In other words, it would be argued that gender is relevant in any analysis pertaining to human experience and that, as an activity taking place within human experience, philosophical discourse is not exempt from such considerations.

II. Gendered Reasoning: Methodology Considerations and Setting the Context

Another stream in the discussions of gendered reasoning, in addition to the discussion of gendered philosophy, operates from the models of specific women's "ways of knowing," "modes of thought," or "forms of reasoning." Here too there are many different aspects, some of which have been discussed quite extensively in the literature; indeed several accounts are paradigmatic for exploring the question of gender and reason, from Carol Gilligan's analyses of the "different voice" and the psychology of gender,¹⁰ to the various applications of the "difference" perspective to "women's ways of knowing" in epistemological terms, women's moral reasoning and feminist ethics, and even feminist science. Some of these accounts have come under critical fire, and although I don't necessarily agree with the particular criticisms, I see possible vulnerabilities in these accounts which can admit such criticisms. Again, I can do no more here than briefly sketch the issues in question, but given the connection with the overall framework I am developing, even a brief sketch may prove salutary.

My principal concern with some of these accounts is not necessarily the perspectives they may be working towards establishing—perspectives which I am equally interested in exploring—but rather their orientation; and here there are clearly larger methodological issues which go beyond the issue in question. In many cases these accounts are essentially empiricist in orientation—indeed many of them are based in an empirically oriented social science. In working from the observation and study of traceable gender differences in their subjects' attitudes and behaviour, they aim at demonstrating the empirical reality of gender differences, and these accounts ground in turn theories of female moral reasoning and female modes of knowledge. In other words, the justification for the claims that there are salient gender differences, and that these differences are operative in processes such as reasoning, is based on the empirical observation and tracking of behavioural, cognitive, attitudinal, and performance related differences between women and men. On the one hand, such studies supply us with the kind of empirical and statistical data and confirmatory evidence that is crucial in such analyses. But on the other hand, when taken alone, they fall prey to the same conceptual and critical difficulties to which strictly empirical analysis is invariably vulnerable.

In working within an empirical methodology, it is not their primary intention to articulate an interpretive grounding and horizontal orientation—the fear is that this will predetermine results, so instead the theory is generated later on the basis of the observed data. I would argue though that without some kind of context of inquiry—going beyond merely methodological considerations—that such empirical generalizations stand alone and are vulnerable to other empirical challenges: for example, how reliable the observations are, how comprehensive the sample, and whether the connections and conclusions drawn are reasonable. If they are disputed for any of these reasons, they run the risk of being labelled as merely arbitrary, partial or circumstantial conclusions. This is in fact the sort of criticism that feminist arguments for gendered reasoning have encountered. A common strategy in the counter-arguments, for example, is to offer up alternatives or counter-examples to the particular claims made in the feminist accounts—that is, to compare empirical instances. For example, in discussing claims that women's thinking is characteristically "narrative-seeking," Sandra Menssen argues that there are many example of stories, accounts, histories—in other words, narrative—written by men, throughout the history of thought.¹¹ Although her major point is to question the connection between modes of thought such as narrative and argument—the imputed connection between these constituting the chief target of her criticism—her point about narrative is clear: there are sufficient counter-examples to undermine the claims of a unique women's perspective. And furthermore,

these examples, even if plausible, do not necessarily make the case for different modes of thinking, particularly in terms of "forms of reasoning":

Even if a case could be made that women rely more on dialogue and discussion than men, what would that tell us about the *forms* used in reasoning? Does the dialogue contain arguments? If so, what kinds of arguments? ... Questions like these need to be raised and answered to support a claim that dialogue and discussion constitute or suggest a *form* of reasoning not found in monologues. [12](#)

So even if the examples or characterizations of different modes of thought are accepted, there is still a gap between a mode of thought—here construed virtually as a "habit of thinking," and a truly different form of reasoning. It's not clear to me that the kind of account that Menssen requires can be made, although I find the possibility of it more intriguing than she does. In other words, I would like to see such an account, but I agree with her—although for different reasons, and from a significantly different orientation—that this approach does not suffice.

These sorts of challenges to empirical claims are inevitable, and I'm not arguing against the validity of such challenges. What I am suggesting is that it is the nature of such empirical inquiry to be vulnerable to such criticisms: in the absence of a theoretical grounding—not as an *a priorism*, but as the articulated context of inquiry, the necessary frame of reference—there is nothing in which to situate these observations, thus their risk of being seen as merely circumstantial or arbitrary. As Husserl pointed out, empirical inquiry makes the fatal error of presupposing what it seeks to deny—the necessity of some kind of theoretical framework—thus contradicting itself, but more fundamentally, failing to articulate at a conscious level the necessary cognitive and interpretive framework which will enable and ground understanding.[13](#) Methodologies are procedural guidelines, not interpretive frameworks, and the tendency to confuse these two, and the failure to recognize the importance of the context of inquiry, is for the phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives one of the classic errors of empirical inquiry.

What I would argue for then is the idea of a context of inquiry, that is, a founded context of interpretation as articulated and thematized horizon which situates and enables claims, without pre-determining them. In other words, a model which is not *a priori* but hermeneutic, the difference between pre-determining and enabling the interpretation; a distinction key to the hermeneutic conception of contextuality, which wants to stress at one and the same time the situatedness of claims while retaining their cognitive freedom. Our claims can be situated without being predetermined; they can be free without being sovereign. At the same time, for the purposes of an account of reasoning, my account borrows from a phenomenology of reasoning the structural principles which enable both descriptive experiential analysis from a situated subjective orientation—even to say a perspective—which allows for specified analysis, while maintaining the viability and verifiability of the claims that issue from that process. This is grounded by unfolding particular experiential patterns and regularities of ascertainable reasoning practices within the theoretical framework of a structural complex within which such discerned patterns are given meaning and reference.

Clearly the sense of theoretical here is not non-contextual, but rather a sense of structural framework which is bound to the experiential context within which it functions. By the same token, experiential is not the same as empirical; a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach seeks to ground its analysis in experience, but in underscoring the significance and inescapability of contextual situation, it is not empirical as such. In this account,

the contextual situation is a theoretical articulation, and the theoretical and reflective framework are intertwined with context and experience.[14](#)

III. Gendered Reasoning: Towards a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Model

I am taking, then, this layered notion of contextuality as my focal point. Once again, given the constraints of time, I can only approach an outline, but it can still serve to lay out the salient features of this approach with respect to the question at hand. Simply put, the general framework of such a discourse from a phenomenological or hermeneutic point of view would be that human experience takes place in the lived world and the context which that lived world constitutes; that such experience is thus contextual, i.e., that it is both informed by and understandable according to the context in which it occurs; that philosophical discourse is one aspect of human activity and experience that, by virtue of being an aspect of such experience, necessarily falls under its existential conditions; philosophical discourse is therefore conditioned by context—philosophy is a contextual enterprise.

Now of course on one level philosophers have always been more than aware of context and experiential situation, particularly in terms of the potential contingency and variability involved, and one version of the story of philosophy is the story of the attempt to contravene and supersede this aspect, to wilfully construct the character of philosophy in defiance of its conditions. The origins of Western philosophy are as such traced in the resonances of ancient quests to defy the perceived limitations of existence—to live beyond death, or to fly when one is earthbound—carried through and imprinted subsequently in the modern period, arguably as a key characteristic of modernity. Indeed, this casting off of mortal coils is characteristically considered a primary orientation of traditional philosophical discourse and reason in its attempt to articulate a-contextual claims and theory, i.e., claims that transcend context, that manage to disengage from their primary contextual situation, realized perhaps in their most ideal and rarefied form in logic.

We all know what happened to Icarus. Nevertheless, his quest is not insignificant, and this is not to suggest that he should not have tried what he did. From the hermeneutic stance, though, any such attempt to nullify or transcend context is at best naive at worst doomed to failure (although perhaps not so dramatically!) This is grounded on one level in the experiential self-giveness and self-evidence of our situatedness in the surrounding world, and that this situatedness is not merely an incidental physical determination of space and time, but that it fundamentally conditions and frames our experience. Such originary insights are in principle verifiable and justifiable by means of analyses ranging from sociological studies to experiential phenomenological analysis.[15](#) And again, these are insights about our situation that on a basic level are generally acknowledged, and which account for the Icarus-like efforts to counteract this situation. Yet from a hermeneutic point of view, it is precisely the fact that such initiatives *do* require something tantamount to an Icarus-like effort (think of Descartes' arguably forced, counter-intuitive, and ultimately artificial process in the *Meditations*) that argues for the claim that these initiatives are unrealistic and unlikely to succeed. Not that the only possible moves are easy ones; but that there is something essentially counter-intuitive about the attempt to negate something so fundamental—perhaps so difficult because it is ultimately impossible.

Disengaging from our fundamental engagement and embeddedness in experiential context, which is not merely our physical location but our ontological one, shaping our being. In this sense, how can the disengagement amount to anything but an abstraction, an artificial construct which on one level has certain uses (thus very much preserving in this framework discourses like logic), provided it is understood for what it is—an idealized construct—and that in the reality of lived thinking and discourse, claims are made within and in relation to a

contextual situation. As such, given the experiential plausibility of the claim of our situatedness and its accompanying conditioning effects, the hermeneutic thinker would argue that the burden of proof rests with whoever would argue for the possibility of neutralizing context, since our shared default sensibility is that we are deeply embedded. And such arguments would quite naturally be open to being deconstructed as on the one hand not really succeeding in detaching from context, if contextual traces, biases, or predispositions are still in evidence, or on the other hand as mere abstractions, which may serve as ideal constructs for certain purposes, but which are ultimately artificial, managing to escape the contingencies of our reality only by creating another, unreal one. In other words, like Icarus, if the initiative "succeeds," it is accompanied by the destruction of being as we knew it.

From the hermeneutic point of view, the necessary contextuality of reflection and discourse is an inevitable feature and condition of such activity, and attempting to supercede this conditionedness is ultimately not the best goal for philosophical striving. Rather, philosophical striving must consist in acknowledging and negotiating the conditions of philosophizing—the hermeneutic philosopher is thus Daedalus, who kept in mind the relevant intrinsic conditions—and in this manner articulating the nature and viability of philosophizing in the face of the contingencies of discourse and the inevitability of situation.

As such, with respect to the specific question at hand, given the inevitable contextuality of reflection and discourse, these activities are particularly realized as practices, informed by socio-cultural factors in a broad sense, and all the attendant specific variables included therein. Thus reasoning too is a particular practice, and reasoning *as such* cannot be separated from the practice of reasoning; except once again in a formal idealized sense, if we wanted to postulate what reasoning *would* be like, were it not subject to the fundamental conditions and framework to which it is subject. Along the lines of the above account, reasoning as a human cognitive activity always takes place in a human experiential process and context and is as such *situated* by that context—i.e., informed and conditioned by its situatedness. If reasoning is situated and invariably conditioned by the socio-cultural and political context in which it functions, a context in which gender figures as a variable, then it will follow that reasoning, as a practice in that context, is potentially informed by gender.[16](#)

This position then requires acceptance—along with the notions of the situatedness of reason in a conditioning context—of the significance of gender as a cultural variable, both in terms of (a) the validity of gender difference (since without the presupposition of difference, presumably gender as we usually understand it would not have much discernible conditioning effect) and in terms of (b) the role and influence played by gender and gender difference in our experience. With regard to (a), we start with the definition of gender as a particular cultural socialization process, where selected traits, behaviours, and characteristics are encultured on the basis of perceived biological sex differences—people are "gendered" in specific social, cultural, and political ways. As such, it would be quite plausible to argue that if the different biological sexes have conditioned differential social traits, and that these traits are potentially determinative in their activities, then it could follow that philosophical discourse, as one activity, is shaped by these traits. In this case it is not even necessary to make arguments about nature or essences arguments which cannot be conclusive, since all we have to go is an already encultured experience.

With respect to (b), it is conceivable, for instance, to recognize the conditioning effects of various contextual variables, without granting that all variables have equal or significant effect. It is therefore necessary to make the case that gender as a cultural variable does in fact exercise a particularly substantial effect (though not necessarily the only, or strongest effect). Here is where the feminist analyses of gender in philosophy such as those sketched above can be positioned, as accounts arguing not only for the presence of the variable of gender, but also for the

strength, depth and extent of its influence as a variable.

Given all this, we are left with the final issue of the validity of philosophical claims in light of the preceding considerations and in the framework of this account. For while this approach I am articulating might renounce the possibility of unconditioned claims, it does not renounce the possibility of philosophical claims—Daedalus, after all, also built wings. The difficulty, of course, in any appeal to contextuality is the risk that reasoning is reduced to a mere concatenation of environmental factors—a kind of cultural naturalism, if you will—in other words, a cultural relativism where what that reasoning generates in the way of knowledge or truth claims becomes subject to the usual difficulties of relativism.

Isn't any account that argues for the situatedness of discourse and the conditioning effects of context running the risk of relativism? And isn't any account that seeks to emphasize women's specific orientation, a particularity like gender, the perspective gender affords in experience, and the particular perspective women's gender affords, tantamount to a perspectivism, in this case a gender perspectivism? In other words, feminism as relativism, as some feminists have (disapprovingly) suggested. And the issue, of how to account for this kind of specificity—a gender perspective, without reverting to perspectivism—has I think not been sufficiently addressed in the feminist analyses of gendered reasoning.

My position is that there is a difference between a gendered perspective and gender perspectivism. That is, it is possible to hold to conditioned and contextualized rationality without falling into the bog of relativism. Such a position has always been the fundamental stance of phenomenological epistemology, and to a lesser extent hermeneutics.¹⁷ The basic justification consists in presenting an account of reasoning, as I suggested above, which allows for experiential and specified analysis, while maintaining the viability and verifiability of the claims that issue from that process. This is in essence the goal of the phenomenological account, especially with respect to epistemological issues. This involves presenting cognition as an experiential, subjective process which can in many respects reflect the various aspects of that subjectivity—for example, that it is situated and orientational, that it is in and part of the lived world (in terms of the rich phenomenological concept of world), thus that it is "worldly" as such, even perspectival. Yet at the same time, in the phenomenological project, this situated subjective orientation undertakes to generate a firmly non-relativistic descriptive experiential analysis within which claims can be grounded and verified. In other words, the account of subjectivity *as such*, as the possibility of articulating generalities which correspond to the situation of being a subject, from a subject's point of view, without such an account amounting to no more than arbitrary and unfounded claims.




Such an account seeks to ground itself thus in the possibility of articulating generalities (to be distinguished from generalizations), based on the idea of structural principles of cognition which are not the Kantian model, but correspond more to particular experiential patterns and regularities of reasoning, which are discernible and verifiable through phenomenological analysis. In other words, they are invariant structures which run through the experiential variance as the cognitive spine, providing the necessary synthesis to what would otherwise be a random, chaotic, and unintelligible concatenation of disconnected experiential moments and acts. Thus even though claims may issue from a situated and even specified orientation, they also correspond to larger structural regularities which amount as such to *practices* of reasoning, and not merely individual random reasoning acts. It is through the notion of practices and regularities of reasoning that possibilities of objectivity are preserved within specified accounts. In other words, the account is both situated *and* grounded.

As such the rearticulation that I alluded to earlier, of notions of objectivity and the grounding of claims is also very much a feature of this project—it does not abandon objectivity, but redefines it according to the


considerations and parameters of this framework which, as should be clear by now, has the critique of traditional notions of objectivity and the idea of the necessity of rethinking these notions as an intrinsic feature. Objectivity is no longer conceived to mean what is non-subjective or detached from experience; instead the notion of objectivity issuing from a phenomenological account can be characterized as a "subjective objectivity"; a term which reflects the subjective yet non-relativistic nature of this notion which, it is maintained, is appropriate not only for a phenomenological account but for any account. Correspondingly, recognizing that experience has relativity is not the same as accepting relativism. As an account whose point of departure is that cognition and reasoning are subjective processes, yet whose cornerstone is also the rejection of relativism and the articulation of the possibility of epistemically justifiable claims, phenomenology frames its project as the analysis of the irrelative of all the relativities of experience. Within a notion of conditioned rationality, such an analysis thus constitutes the basis for a viable sense of rationality, and the possibility of meaning and understanding.


In closing, I would argue that the phenomenological-hermeneutic account provides a better founded and more viable theoretical structure for discussions of conditioned reasoning, in this case gendered reasoning in particular. While other accounts may provide empirical cases and evidence of gendered reasoning, such accounts are vulnerable to counter-argumentation on the basis of counter-examples or alternative interpretations of the instances in question. In contrast, in providing an account of the nature of conditioned and contextualized discourse, the phenomenological-hermeneutic framework furnishes an internally coherent and grounded basis—the context—for a plausible account of gendered reasoning, precisely by grounding this instance of contextual and particularized reasoning in the larger account of contextualized discourse. Thus some of the conceptual and critical difficulties to which the feminist "difference" accounts of gendered reason can fall prey are arguably avoided. At the same time, one of the issues left open in many feminist accounts of gendered reason—a gender perspective without perspectivism—can be addressed. In so doing one of the traditional barriers to accepting notions of conditioned reasoning—in this case gendered reasoning—can perhaps be alleviated.

Notes


1. Cf. for example Karen J. Warren, "Critical Thinking and Feminism," *Informal Logic* 10 (1988): 31-44; Deborah Orr, "Just the Facts Ma'am: Informal Logic, Gender and Pedagogy," *Informal Logic* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 1-10; Michael A. Gilbert, "Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence," *Informal Logic* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 95-113; Sandra Menssen, "Do Women and Men Use Different Logics? A Reply to Carol Gilligan and Deborah Orr," *Informal Logic* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 123-138. 
2. Cf. for example Andrea Nye, *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Karen Warren, "Critical Thinking and Feminism," op.cit. 
3. In accordance with the standard distinction used in feminism, sex refers to the biological distinctions between males and females, while gender denotes the socio-cultural construction of masculine and feminine cultural traits and characteristics. 
4. It is possible, of course, to agree that gender is relevant but, based on the philosophical concerns outlined above, to maintain nevertheless that it is not relevant for philosophy. In other words, it might be relevant for sociological or historical issues, but once again, given philosophy's self-perception as transcending such concerns and particularities, it also transcends the application of a gender analysis. My position, as I say, is that philosophy


is not exempt. 

5. I have in mind here for example the work of Lorraine Code, Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox Keller, Helen Longino. 

6. Cf. for example, Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1986): 439-456; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974). 

7. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering.- Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). 


8. Hence, the well-known feminist claims that supposedly gender-neutral accounts are in fact (male)gendered, and moreover that in putting forward as gender-neutral what are in fact male gendered accounts, the working assumption is that this is the universal account. In other words, what is in reality a male account is taken to be the standard, default account. Thus at one and the same time the male perspective is universalized, all the while hiding its gender specificity; thus, enabling its architects and proponents not only to fail to see its specificity, but thus fail to acknowledge specificity at all, and therefore be able to hold to ideals of neutrality. Indeed, in the final analysis, it is the specificity at issue that makes it impossible to recognize specificity. 


9. Val Plumwood, "The Politics of Reason: Towards a Feminist Logic." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 71, no. 4 (December 1993):437. 


10. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). 

11. Sandra Menssen, "Do Women and Men Use Different Logics? A Reply to Carol Gilligan and Deborah Orr," op.cit., p. 129. 


12. Ibid. 


13. This argument, which Husserl also applies to other questionable tendencies such as naturalism and psychologism, is found for example in the *Logical Investigations* and in his essay "Philosophy as Rigorous Science." 

14. The distinction here, from a phenomenological point of view, is essentially that empirical reasoning proceeds from discretely observed empirical cases, in order to arrive at larger generalizations, in other words, inductive reasoning, while phenomenological reasoning is in some sense both inductive and deductive. It remains centered in experiential observation and description, but seeks also to reflect within a more structured theoretical perspective; that is, it does not hold that all knowledge comes from experience alone. 

15. Such studies can of course overlap in phenomenological sociology, which played an important role in the beginning of the century, but which is largely ignored today by the predominantly scientific sociology. 

16. This may indeed not include logic. That is, logic may not be gendered, but then from a phenomenological

point of view, logic is a formal idealization, an idealized methodological paradigm, but not necessarily equivalent to an experiential reasoning practice. This is why Husserl, a logician and arithmetician, did not employ standard logical argumentation in phenomenological analysis. 

17. Although contemporary hermeneutics has not made arguments against relativism a central part of its project to the extent that phenomenology has, where the anti-relativism arguments are a characteristic and in a sense determinative factor in the latter's development, nevertheless hermeneutics has always strongly resisted suggestions that it is relativistic simply due to its perspectives on context and the horizon of being. At the same time, where certain discourses like postmodernism have been less reluctant to embrace relativistic tendencies, this has constituted one of the most salient differences between such discourses and hermeneutics. 

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